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ABSTRACT

As the impact of residential living on the overall college experience is recognized, resident advisers must be human growth educators as well as facilitators of dormitory functions. This new role for resident advisers makes the task of staff selection more complex than it has been in the past. Personnel administrators must pay closer attention than ever before to those qualities deemed essential to the role of resident hall advisers. Many skills have been identified as essential to the role of resident hall adviser. Organizational skills and administrative abilities are needed for such tasks as moving students in and out of dormitories, making room and roommate assignment changes, and reporting maintenance needs. Resident advisers must be capable of facilitating situations and assuring that institutional rules and regulations are observed. They must be able to approach situations with assertiveness and handle problems hastily and discreetly. Other important skills are in communication and basic counseling techniques. Resident advisers must be able to clearly and concisely communicate policy and procedural matters. Resident advisers appear to succeed largely on the basis of their personal adjustment to living in a high-intensity living environment. Resident advisers must be trained in a broad spectrum of abilities. Well-trained and skilled resident advisers can make a difference in the academic success of the student living in the dormitory. (Author/NB)

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SKILLS ESSENTIAL TO THE ROLE OF RESIDENT HALL ADVISER

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Abstract

Through the years resident hall advisers have served primarily as disciplinarians who enforce rules and regulations. However, this view of the role and function of resident advisers has diminished, for they are now viewed as active participants in educating and facilitating human growth as well as helpers in resident functions. These ideas make the task of staff selection more complex than it has been in the past. Therefore, personnel administrators must pay closer attention than ever before to those qualities deemed essential to the role of resident hall adviser.

Skills Essential to the Role of Resident Hall Adviser

Resident hall living has gone beyond being simply "living space." Due to the increasing recognition of the impact of residential living on the overall college experience, by housing personnel administrators, housing staff must be more than mere overseers of dormitory procedure and policy. There is an increasing belief among leaders in the field that resident advisers (RAs) must also be human growth educators as well as facilitators of dormitory functions. These ideas make the problem of staff selection much more complex than it has been in the past.

Much information has been generated concerning those skills which are deemed essential to the role of RA. There was no attempt to cover all those qualities. However, this discussion focuses on those qualities that are believed to be not only essential, but also common to those discussed in most research.

Newton and Richardson (1976) cited organizational skills and administrative abilities as competencies needed by those individuals working in close relationships with students. There are certain, inescapable duties of the housing staff that require practical, requisite skills such as moving students in and out of dorms, making room and roommate assignment changes, and reporting maintenance needs.

In the movement of people from place to place and the resulting interaction of large groups of individuals living together in

a relatively confined space, there are certain unavoidable conflicts that result. RAs have an obligation to the institution to insure that institutional rules and regulations are observed. Therefore, the housing administrator must be sure that those individuals selected to serve as RAs are capable of facilitating situations. For example, noise, a common housing complaint, creates myriad potential confrontations that must be handled expeditiously and judiciously. Problems of alcohol consumption and drug use are also problems which RAs must be able to handle discreetly and hastily. Consequently, RAs must be individuals who can approach these situations not aggressively but with assertiveness.

Shelton and Mathis (1976), noted in their study that effective versus noneffective RAs can be distinguished on the basis of assertiveness. They showed that RAs with assertiveness traits tend to be more open, more honest, less likely to avoid conflicts, better able to handle discipline problems and better able to communicate skillfully. Hummers (1980) has also stated that a type of inservice training program on assertiveness can be especially useful to RAs. Once adequately prepared to address those problems that cannot be circumvented, RAs can then attend to those areas that not only make one an effective member of the housing staff team, but also an effective human being.

Skills which are particularly important are in communication and basic counseling techniques. Since RAs represent the housing administration and, therefore, are the administration's direct link with the students, it is essential for the institution to

employ individuals who can clearly and concisely communicate policy and procedural matters.

Schroeder (1976) indicated a further dimension in the need for communication skills: RAs are responsible for promoting group process and the objectives of intimacy, cohesiveness, mutual trust, and cooperation. Without proper training in basic communication skills RAs would be unable to promote such fundamental group functions. Those functions, of necessity, must be the foundation toward which the housing staff builds to accomplish their goal of a learning environment. Without good group interaction on the individual hall levels, the staff cannot hope to obtain more than the previously described "living space" situation.

Once the housing staff have facilitated the growth of its residents as a group, they may then concentrate on helping particlar individuals in their hall communities. The pressures and strains of everyday life when coupled with the added burden of academic demands can pose a serious threat to an individual student's emotional stability. To cope with this situation, members of the RA staff should have strong counseling skills.

Osterhout (1977) noted that training in counseling skills enhances interpersonal skills. These skills are useful to the members of the hall community because when they have problems, there will be an individual--the resident hall adviser--with whom they can share information and seek guidance. Furthermore, Osterhout identified such training as an effective way for the administrator to facilitate professional developement of the staff.

Shilling (1977) reported that interpersonal and group skills training increase an individual's self-concept and level of self-satisfaction. Staff members who have received such training tended to be more cohesive and dedicated to their jobs. This is consequential when considering Zirkle and Hudson's study (1975) in which they reported that RAs significantly influence the psychological development of the members on that floor. RAs with the requisite skills maintained floors whose members had higher grade point averages and significantly higher scores on a test of psychosocial maturity than did students whose RAs lacked such skills.

RAs appear to succeed largely on the basis of their personal adjustment to living in a high-intensity living environment. Living in the dormitories of any college campus can reasonably be assumed to be a "high-intensity living environment" (Dickson et al., 1977). Therefore, those who are best adjusted to dormitory life are conceivably best able to help others adjust to dormitory life.

It has become clear in the last decade that providing RAs with training in a broad spectrum of abilities is far more important than was formerly believed. Additionally, it has been noted that well-trained, skillful RAs can make a difference in the academic success of the student on his or her dormitory floor.

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